

PRESS RELEASE

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Date: 14 February 2005

Herefordshire and Shropshire in the running for film awards judged by Hollywood star Jude Law

GANDALF' TO BRING A TOUCH OF MAGIC TO YOUNG FILMMAKERS' 'MINI OSCARS®' IN LONDON ON 23 FEBRUARY 2005

LONDON: A panel of celebrity judges - including *Alfie* star **Jude Law** - is busy deciding whether films made by young filmmakers from **Herefordshire and Shropshire** will scoop awards in the **Best Comedy, Best Special Effects and Best Horror / Thriller** categories at a star-studded ceremony in London later this month.

The three films – all produced in collaboration with **The Rural Media Company** with a budget of around £10,000 each – have been nominated for First Light Film Awards at the Odeon West End in London's Leicester Square on the morning of 23 February 2005. **Sir Ian McKellen**, Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, will be there to present an award and the ceremony will be hosted by **Jake Humphrey** of CBBC and *Fame Academy 2*.

The nominated films from Herefordshire and Shropshire are:

***Extreme Granny Switch*, Best Comedy nominee**

When the local eccentric Mrs Skate has her bag stolen, she mistakenly blames the local skaters. The film follows their attempts to convince her they are innocent. The film was produced by a group of 13 to 17 year old filmmakers.

***Screwball*, Best Special Effects nominee**

This comedy drama sees a local bully taking on an eccentric wannabe magician over a game of pool. The film was made by a group of eight filmmakers between the ages of 12 to 14.

***Battery Life*, Best Horror / Thriller nominee**

In this *Blair Witch* style thriller, three boys on a camping trip get lost in the Herefordshire woods. They make a video diary chronicling the strange goings on around them. A group of eight 14 to 16 year old filmmakers shot the film.

The First Light Film Awards celebrate the best short films made by children and young people between the ages of 5 and 18 from across the UK. The films were created through the UK Film Council's First Light initiative, using National Lottery grants worth an average of £5,000 per project.

The judging team also includes **Rupert Grint**, (Ron Weasley in the *Harry Potter* films); filmmaker/actor **Stephen Fry**; **Romola Garai** (*Inside I'm Dancing*), **Pawel Pawlikowski**, (Director of award-winning film *My Summer of Love*); and Evening Standard Film Award winner **Natalie Press** who stars in the film; celebrated author **Nick Hornby**; and **Pam Ferris** (Aunt Marge in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*).

Award presenters alongside **Sir Ian McKellen** include **Asher D** (So Solid Crew member and star of forthcoming film *Bullet Boy*); **Amma Asante** (Director of *A Way of Life* and winner of the London Film Festival UK Film Talent award); **Joe Prospero** (*Finding Neverland*); **Colin Salmon** (*Alien vs Predator, Bond*); **Nicolas Roeg** (Director of *The Witches* and *Castaway*); and **Hugh Hudson** (Director of film classic *Chariots of Fire*).

First Light, which is managed by Birmingham-based Hi8us First Light Limited, was launched by the UK Film Council in May 2001. To date it has given around 8,500 young people the chance to write, act, shoot and produce more than 550 films under the guidance of professional filmmakers. First Light works in association with youth agencies, schools, colleges, production companies and film clubs throughout the UK. Some young filmmakers have used First Light as a stepping stone to gain work experience in the film industry.

Announcing the nominations UK Film Council Chief Executive Officer John Woodward said:

"Thanks to First Light, young people from across the UK have produced some fantastic films despite having little or no previous experience of filmmaking. These films demonstrate the wealth of talent and creativity present in young people throughout the UK."

First Light Chief Executive Officer Pip Eldridge said, "The 2005 Awards promises to be the most exciting of all our ceremonies. The nominated films are fantastically imaginative and diverse, while the judges and award presenters represent the very best of the UK filmmaking world. It's going to be an occasion to remember."

Krycia Rozanska, Chief Executive of Screen West Midlands said: "We are very proud of the young film makers from Herefordshire and Shropshire. It is great achievement to have 3 films nominated for these prestigious awards and we are delighted to be a partner with **The Rural Media Company** who is a leader in encouraging and nurturing young talent. We hope they have a fantastic time at the awards in London and perhaps this will set them on a path to a future career in filmmaking".

Nic Millington, Director of The Rural Media Company said, "These nominations demonstrate the huge potential of rural young people. It shows that you don't need to live in a major city to take part and achieve success in such a popular and contemporary art form". He went on to say, "The key to unlocking young people's talent at this level lies in committed partnerships with local and regional youth and education services and good links with media development agencies and professionals working in the film and TV industries. In this way, young people learn the technical and social skills necessary to building a media career, while enjoying and expressing themselves. The young filmmakers responsible for these three films worked incredibly hard and deserve this validation for their efforts." Support for the making of the films also came from Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership and Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council.

Release ends

Note to Editors

- The Rural Media Company works throughout the UK. It combines community and informal education, training and advocacy with professional skills of the media industries. The results are effective, high impact, high quality media projects and educational materials at the cutting edge of current policy and debate. The Rural Media Company gratefully acknowledges the financial support of Screen West Midlands and Herefordshire Cultural Services.
- First Light was launched in May 2001 to fund and inspire the making of short digital films, reflecting the diversity of young people's lives. First Light is an initiative supported by the UK Film Council with £1 million of National Lottery funding a year and is managed by Hi8us First Light Limited.
- The UK Film Council is the lead agency for film in the UK ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad. We invest Government grant-in-aid and Lottery money in film development and production; training; international development and export promotion; distribution and exhibition; and education. Our aim is to deliver lasting benefits to the industry and the public alike through:

creativity - encouraging the development of new talent, skills, and creative and technological innovation in UK film and assisting new and established film-makers to produce successful and distinctive British films;

enterprise - supporting the creation and growth of sustainable businesses in the film sector, providing access to finance and helping the UK film industry compete successfully in the domestic and global marketplace;

imagination - promoting education and an appreciation and enjoyment of cinema by giving UK audiences access to the widest range of UK and international cinema, and by supporting film culture and heritage.

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